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HOMILETIC MONTHLY

Sermon-Sketches for the Sundays of the Year.

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Homiletic Monthly.

INDEX.

		PAGE.
1.	Waiting upon the Lord	1
2.	His Mother kept these Sayings in her Heart	5
3.	Six Waterpots for Six Classes of Persons	7
4.	Forgiveness of Injuries	11
5.	The Visible and the Invisible Kingdom	17
6.	The Word of God	20
7.	Spiritual Light	24
8.	Temptation	27
9.	Cross and Crown	29
10.	The Tongue	33
11.	Almsgiving	37
12.	The Man-God	40
13.	Lesson of the Palms	44
14.	The Christian's Triumph	49
15.	The Triumph of Faith	53
16.	Knowing Christ	55
17.	Devotion to St. Joseph	59
18.	Devotion to the Holy Ghost	60
19.	Prayer	65
20.	Lessons of the Ascension	69
21.	The Triple Pentecost	72
22.	The Miracle of Christianity	76
23.	The Love of Christ	81
24.	The Sacred Heart in the M. Bl. Sacrament	84
25.	Penance	88
26.	The Word of God	92
27.	Anger	94
28.	Indwelling Holiness	97
29.	The Most Precious Blood	103
30.	The Scapular	106
31.	The Day of Visitation	107
32.	The Humble Prayer	109
33.	The Evil Effects of Sin	113
34.	The Christian Priesthood	118
35.	Union with Jesus and Mary	121

PAGE.
36. Confidence 125
37. Peace in War 127
38. Temporal and Eternal Peace 129
39. The Holy Name of Mary 133
40. The Meaning of the Dolors 136
41. Simplicity 140
42. The Rosary a Great Prayer 145
43. Perseverance in Prayer 148
44. The Duty of Forgiveness 152
45. Temporal and Spiritual Duties 153
46. Patience 156
47. Devotion to the Saints 161
48. Our Duty to our Neighbor 163
49. The Sign of the Cross 168
50. The Apostolate of Example 172
51. The General Judgment 175
52. Preparation for Christ's Coming 177
53. Lessons of the Immaculate Conception 182
54. Characteristics of Christ 185
55. Humility 187
56. Rash Judgments 188
57. Receiving the Saviour 191

HOMILETIC MONTHLY

First Sunday in Advent.
Feast of the Immaculate Conception B. V. M.
Second Sunday in Advent.
Third Sunday in Advent.
Fourth Sunday in Advent.
Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Epist. Rom. XIII, 11-14.
Gosp. Luke XXI, 25-33.

Subject.—*Preparation for Christ's Coming.*

Text.—*They shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with great power and Majesty.* (Gospel.)

Introduction.—On last Sunday, the final Sunday of her year, the Church, the "prudent householder," drew forth from her treasures of sacred texts, one that should remind us of the terrible Judgment Day. Surely the symbolism of that last Sunday found appropriate comment in the words of Christ describing the last day of time. But why should the same picture be presented to us on this, the first day of her year?

Transition.—All our labors should be guided, and all our zeal should be quickened, by the consideration of the end we are seeking—"whatever thou doest, do with prudence, looking to the end," sang the Roman poet. If we should exercise prudence in the common affairs of life, shall we give less care to the great, *the greatest*, affair of *salvation?* At the beginning, therefore, let us look to the end! We are

preparing to commemorate worthily the First Advent of Christ—the Saviour! If we learn to do this aright, we shall be preparing ourselves worthily for the Second Advent of Christ—the Judge!

With regard to the Advents of Christ, we shall consider

I. How men have prepared for them.
II. How we should prepare for them.

First Point.—The history we are about to consider is a sad one. For great events are told therein, and events whose meaning for mankind is of the very highest concern. And yet, *man*, whom God made only a little less than the Angels; *man*, whom He set over all the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field; *man*, whom all creatures, even the very Angels, those "ministering spirits, sent to minister for those who receive the inheritance of salvation" (Heb. i, 14), do serve through God's exceeding great love for us—behold! this *intelligent* being, this "paragon of excellence," seems unable to understand the most manifest of God's dealings with him; receives a revelation of God's coming to him, and knows Him not, and receives Him not, when that great King of kings and Lord of lords deigns to come to him! This is true of all the Advents of Christ. Consider

a. *The First Advent.* Wondrous revelation is made to the guilty Adam, and to Eve, his partner in the primal sin. Hopeless, a divine hope is given to them to cling to. The revelation of a Redeemer receives a new confirmation in the promise to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to David! The Chosen People preserve and transmit to posterity this golden hope. Prophets describe in minutest detail the signs that shall precede and accompany the manifestation of the Redeemer. (Enter briefly into an enumeration of the Messianic prophecies.) The very birthplace, and the very time, are clearly set forth, as well as the characteristics, of

the Saviour. At last, the long hope of Israel, the long desire of its prophets and saints, the theme of its song and story and prophecy, the only key to its religious beliefs and ceremonies, the only explanation of its history as a Chosen People—at last, at last *He* cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosannah in the highest! Glory to God, and peace to men of good will! Ah! brethren, is it so? *The Desire of the Nations* comes, and they who are to profit so much by His coming, know not that He has come! We should imagine that as the time foretold by the prophets drew near, all Israel must have been preparing with intensest yearning, with sweetest tears, with liveliest contrition, with tenderest entreaty, for that *God* Who should Himself come and save Israel, as the Prophet had foretold (Isa. xxxv, 4). But what really happened? St. John tells us in a few words the saddest of human history: *He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not* (I., 10—11).

b. *The Second Advent.* Just as the First Advent was heralded by many signs to the Jews, so shall the Second Advent be heralded by signs in the heavens and on the earth—so much so, that men shall "wither away with fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world" (Luke xxi, 26). But even with those clear signs before their eyes, will men recall the prophecy of Christ, and be led to prepare for His awful coming, His Second Advent? Listen to the words of Christ: *But yet the Son of Man when he cometh, shall he find, think you, faith on earth?* (Luke xviii, 8).

c. *A Third Advent*: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come" (Matt. xxiv, 42). Christ will come to us before the day of General Judgment. He will come as a thief in the night! And yet, brethren, how many signs He still

vouchsafes us, and how we still refuse to understand them aright! The heavens shall not, indeed, be folded up as a book; the earth shall not, indeed, pass away in fire, when an immortal soul goes before the judgment-seat of Christ. And yet how many signs there are, after all, for him that runs to read! There is sickness, weakening our strength; there are the passing years, shortening our little term of life; there are the deaths of our friends, relations, acquaintances, blessed perhaps beyond our measure, with health and strength and the prospects these held out, of a long life! Behold, how the fig-tree is even now putting forth its leaves! Behold, how the shadows are even now lengthening on the dial!

And still, when Christ comes to us to judge us, shall we be prepared? If he should come to us now, are we indeed prepared to meet Him?

d. A Fourth Advent. Christ comes to us, into our hearts! We could never dream of such infinite condescension, if infallible Truth had not Himself declared it. (Analogies in human affairs—how a Prince is received, a noble, a distinguished visitor, a dear friend, etc. What exquisite care in adornment of the honored dwelling, and in the courtesies extended to the visitor! Zacheus' reception of Our Saviour into his house.—How do we prepare for Christ? Ah! the pity of it! Evil habits, associations, venial sins, the remnants of mortal sins—perhaps, O Lord! mortal sin itself!)

Second Point.—History repeats itself in some fashion even in the First Advent! For this season of four weeks is set apart by the Church for a commemoration of the four thousand years during which man was to prepare himself for that gracious manifestation of

a. The First Advent. We shall take warning by the sad story of those forty centuries. Christ is coming to us

now, *in figure.* But the Feast of Christmas is, if we consider it closely, not a mere commemoration, not a mere *figure.* He shall be born again, if we but will it, in our hearts, even as He is born for us again daily on our altars. We shall, then, correct the evil features of that elder preparation of the Jews for His coming; that is, we shall maintain an *abiding sense* of the necessity of a worthy preparation; we shall *yearn* for the Bread of Life; we shall *sigh with contrition* for those sins which keep us far from Him; we shall *pray* for right dispositions; we shall be forever on the alert, *watching* for Him in spiritual vigils! Such a frame of mind will be the best preparation for

b. *The Second Advent*; for then it cannot be of us that He shall complain: "The Son of man when He cometh, will He find, think ye, faith on earth?" Thus, too, shall we be preparing ourselves for

c. *The Third Advent*, when, although He should come as "a thief in the night," He will still find us watching! "Blessed is that servant whom when his Lord shall come he shall find so doing!" (Matt. xxiv, 46). And thus, too, shall we be worthily trying to give the Babe of Bethlehem in

d. *The Fourth Advent*, Holy Communion, a fitting abode in our heart. We must not let it be written in Heaven concerning *us*, that "He came unto *His own*, and *His own* received Him not!"

Conclusion.—A practical resolution is offered to us, brethren, as a result of our meditation! However Christ shall come, whether "in a cloud, with great power and majesty," as in the Second Advent; whether in a cloud of human flesh, hiding the power and majesty of the divinity, as in His First Advent; whether in the cloud of our physical death, which is to hide forever from our eyes all the empty gains and ambitions of earth; whether in the cloud of the sacramental Species, hiding even His Sacred Humanity from our eyes—we have it in our power to recognize and prepare

worthily for that awful coming. St. Paul tells us how to do this in the Epistle of this Sunday: "*Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light; let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Amen.

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION B. V. M.

Epist. Prov. VIII, 22-35.
Gosp. Matt. I, 1-16.

Subject.—*Lessons of the Immaculate Conception.*

Text.—*Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*" (Gosp.)

Introduction.—The words of our text, although a simple historical statement, contain all the lessons suggested by the grand dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Transition.—Let us try to understand these lessons aright, and to apply to our spiritual needs the truth taught by them. This great truth is, we shall find, *sin*, its Consequences, and its Remedy. We shall consider

I. The lessons.
II. Their meaning.

First Point.—Our text tells us

a. The fact of the incarnation of God. It therefore speaks of sin, original and actual, which God would destroy and conquer by the scheme of the Redemption. (Amplify.)

b. The close association of Mary with Jesus. The loving devotion of Catholics to Our Lady is not misplaced or

misdirected. The Evangelist places these blessed names so closely together, not by an accident! For where Jesus is, there is Mary! Sketch Mary's close fellowship with Christ in the mysteries of the Annunciation, Visitation (when the Baptist was sanctified and Elizabeth inspired, through Mary's presence), the Nativity, the Presentation, Finding in the Temple; the life at Nazareth for thirty years; the Sorrowful Mysteries, when the sword of Sorrow pierced His Heart only through hers; the Glorious Mysteries, especially the Assumption and Coronation, when Mother and Son were forever united in Heaven; St. John's vision of the "great sign in Heaven; a woman clothed with the sun," etc.,—Apoc., chap. xii. (a vision which has furnished the inspiration of artistic masterpieces commemorating the Immaculate Conception).

c. *The fulfilment of that early revelation of God to sinning Adam:* "I will put enmity between thee (the Serpent) and the woman; between thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel," (another suggestion of which art has availed itself in order to symbolize this grand mystery of the Immaculate Conception.)

d. The *reasons* of this mystery. If *She* was to crush Sin in the person of the Serpent, then must she never be under the dominion of the Serpent, even for a moment. Again, She was to be the Mother of Christ, that is, of a God-Man, infinite in sanctity, purity, and *essentially* opposed to sin; and she was to be the Daughter, by special predilection, of the Eternal Father, and the Spouse, in the work of the Incarnation (quote the words of the Angel in the Annunciation) of the Holy Ghost—titles, all of them, to a perfect immunity from sin and from even the tendency to sin, called concupiscence—*fomes peccati.*

e. With these truths before it, the Church *defined* the dogma. (State the dogma clearly; sketch the history of the devotion, as found in the Breviary for this Feast;

show how the Church in defining it, at this late day, adds nothing to the deposit of revelation, but makes obligatory on all, a belief in that "doctrine once delivered to the Saints," at least *implicitly*.

Second Point.—But seeing with Holy Mother Church, the reason for this dogma of faith, let us not lose its meaning for our souls. All of these reasons speak to us of God's hatred of *sin*, shown by His cursing of the Serpent; by the infinite humiliation of the Incarnation (when he "emptied Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a servant" as St. Paul says); and by the fact that, even in that humiliation, there was one circumstance of ignominy which, nevertheless, He would not tolerate, viz., that the Mother who should give Him human flesh, should ever, even for the briefest moment, be under the cursed dominion of Sin.

If then Our Immaculate Lady, although never under the ban of sin, led a life of endless striving after perfection—perfect though she already was; and if, although possessing no tendency to sin, she nevertheless led a life of constant self-denial, mortification of the senses, retirement, prayer—shall *we*, sinners in Adam, and many times placed under the sentence of death by *actual* sins, and finding in our own sin-tainted natures a thousand incentives and allurements to sin, —shall *we* take no trouble to avoid sin, to fly its occasions, to crush its first beginnings, to strengthen our wills against it by vigilance, prayer, contrition, love?

Conclusion.—Thank God, brethren, that in Mary we have not only a model of how to battle against sin; not only an ideal of spiritual beauty to strive after; but a powerful Advocate, a merciful and compassionate Helper, a tenderest Mother, to comfort and reassure us in this manly struggle! "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee!" (See also in the *Raccolta* the various indulgenced devotions in honor of the Immaculate Conception.)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

Epist. Rom. XV, 4-13.
Gosp. Matt. XI, 2-10.

Subject.—*Characteristics of the Christ.*

Text.—*Art Thou He that is to come, or look we for another?* (Gosp.)

Introduction.—The Christ was foretold, his characteristic marks clearly pointed out, in Jewish type and figure, in promise and in prophecy. Still, as we found in considering last Sunday's Gospel, when He did come, His own people received Him not. Even the disciples of the Precursor were hesitating in acknowledging Him. When John, therefore, who knew Him to be the Christ, sent them to Him with the question of our text, Christ answers them only by an appeal to the prophecies: "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

Transition.—When the Christ comes to us at Christmas, what manner of man shall we look for, brethren? Amen! Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in the Saviour! For the world does not know Him: He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not! Do we Christians, disciples, not of the Precursor, but of the Christ, do *we* know Him? Let us see how *Christians*, who should be so patterned after His model as to be *other Christs*, deny and know not the Saviour!

Let us consider

I. The signs of the Christ;
II. The signs of the Christian.

First Point.—He was to be

I. *A King.* "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" But Christ, King not only of the Jews, but of Heaven and earth, came "meek and humble of heart." (Develop).

II. *A Teacher.* "He hath done no iniquity, neither was there deceit in His mouth" (Isa. 53, 9). (Speak of the good works, temporal and spiritual, of this Teacher).

III. *A Priest.* "He hath borne the sins of many, and hath prayed for the transgressors" (Isa. 53, 17). (See the whole of chap. 53—a Messianic prophecy; also St. Paul's description of the priesthood of Christ, Heb. chaps. vii-xi. This High Priest offers *Himself* as a sacrifice for *sin!*)

Second Point.—If Christ was

a. A King, Christians are "a kingly priesthood" (1 Pet. ii, 9), in a spiritual sense. But our "kingdom is not of this world," as our Saviour puts it. It is a kingdom built not on human power, vanity, ambition, wealth, but on *meekness* and *humility*. "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart." Brethren, what kind of a king are these proud, ambitious, merciless hearts of ours expecting? Art Thou, O King of meekness and lowliness, He that is to come, or look we for another?

b. A Teacher, Christians are to teach others the way of salvation: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." And, "you are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people, *that you may declare His virtues*, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light," (Pet. ii, 9). Brethren, are our lives and works lessons to our brethren, of the light to which Christ has introduced us? "So let your light shine before men." What kind of a Teacher are we indeed expecting? Art Thou, *O Light that shinest in darkness*, He that is to come, or look we for another?

c. A Priest. Christians are also "a kingly priesthood" in a spiritual sense. We must offer *a clean oblation* of prayers, good works, holy and spotless lives, to our Creator. Our High Priest offered himself; shall not we offer to God all that we have and all that we are, to

serve Him worthily? Brethren, what kind of a Priest are we expecting? Art though, O High Priest, who didst enter by *thine own blood* into the holy of holies, He that is to come, or look we for another?

Conclusion.—"Wherefore, receive one another, as Christ also hath received you unto the honor of God." (Epistle.) Let all men receive from you the meekness of the King, the Light of the Teacher, the prayers of the Priest.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Epist. Phil. IV, 4-7.
Gosp. John I, 19-28.

Subject.—*Humility.*

Text.—"*The latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose.*" (Gospel.)

Introduction.—The pride of the Jews led them to expect a Messias who should give great temporal glory to Israel: and they knew not, in the lowly Saviour, Him that was to redeem Israel—Him, "the King of Glory."

Transition.—The King of Glory is coming again to us—meek and humble of heart. We shall know him aright only by humbling ourselves. Consider

First Point.—The example of the Baptist. (Show his greatness, his sanctity.) He was the *Angel* of the prophecy: "Behold, I send my Angel, and he shall prepare the way before my face" (Mal. iii, 1). This Precursor of the Lord came "in the power and the spirit of Elias." Of him Christ said: "There is not born of woman greater than John the Baptist." He is sanctified in his mother's womb—wonderful privilege! And yet this great Saint thought himself un-

worthy of the meanest offices towards the Christ! "The latchet of whose shoe," etc.

Second Point.—*The example of Christ*, the Saint of saints, the King of Glory. (Develop His humble birth, surroundings, companions in the preaching of the Gospel, death.)

Third Point.—*The examples of the Saints.* (Our Lady's humility; that of the Apostles—"we are made a spectacle to angels and to men;" that of the greatest saints of the Church, who steadily refused all honors, emoluments, etc.)

Fourth Point.—*We are sinners*: (necessity of humility. Explain its true meaning; its various degrees; its rewards, in purity of conscience, in peace of mind, in patience, etc.; show its real *manliness* in its reasonableness.)

Conclusion.—Humility brings peace. "And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Epistle)—Amen

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FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Epist. 1 Cor. IV. 1-5.
Gosp. Luke III, 1-6.

Subject.—*Rash Judgments.*

Text.—"*Judge not before the time.*" (Epistle.)

Introduction.—Christ, who is now coming to us in *mercy*, shall come at the last day in *justice*. "If any man hear my words, and keep them not, I do not judge him: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world" (John xii, 47). If Christ judge us not before the time, shall we dare judge our neighbor before the day of judging come? *Christ* knows the most hidden things of the heart, and is the Judge

that is to come: *we* know *not* the hidden things of the heart, and are *not* the judges appointed to judge our fellow-men. There is one, "Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead" (II Tim. iv, 1).

Transition.—To strengthen ourselves against the too-prevailing vice of rash judgment, we shall consider

I. What it is;
II. Its sinfulness;
III. Its causes;
IV. Its effects.

First Point.—Show the difference in *degree* between rash judgment and rash snspicion.—Illustrate by examples. Even when the action is not sinful, some people arrogate to themselves the right of judging the hidden *intention*, become "searchers of the hearts of men," like to God Himself! Show when it is lawful.

Second Point.—It sins against

a. Charity: for we should love all men for the sake of Him who so loved us that He would not judge the world *before the time.* But love prompts us to be merciful in our judgments of others.

b. Justice. Experience must often have shown us how *unjust* were our opinions of others. How many things happen in our own course of life and action, which are easily susceptible of unfavorable interpretation? If others should judge us harshly in these, should we not be the victims of *injustice*? Even in things which on the surface seem to point clearly to sin, how easily we are mislead! (Quote the example of Joseph and the wife of Putiphar; Susanna and the two judges who accused her. The circumstances and and the evidence seemed clearly to point to their guilt. But both Joseph and Susanna were judged of evil precisely *because* of their virtuous rejection of the

evil!) Even if the action be clearly bad in itself, how shall we be able to judge the intention? Perhaps the sin is one of *ignorance*; or of *thoughtlessness*; or of *surprise*. Leave the sinner to Him who searcheth the hearts and the reins!

c. Humility. "Why seest thou a mote in thy brother's eye, and seest not a beam in thy own eye? Thou hypocrite (*harsh words from the tender lips of the Saviour!*) cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matt. vii, 3-5). We shall find enough in our own evil hearts and lives to pass judgment upon with many sighs and deep remorse!

Third Point—Its causes are

a. Thoughtlessness. We think ourselves *shrewd* and *wise* and *discerning:* alas! we are thoughtless fools, judging where we have no right to judge, and misjudging that which we dare to judge!

b. Pride. We feel a sense of superior virtue, strength against temptation, more powerful will, etc.; alas! our strength is the strength of a reed; our glory is the glory of the flower! Do we examine our life-history aright?

c. Hatred, aversion, and similar motives. We easily misjudge where love shields not, and where aversion points the way.

d. A sense of our own wickedness, which makes us suspect the virtue of others. There are the old proverbs of the "glass house," and "Set a thief to catch a thief." If we examine our own hearts, how often we find them peculiarly blameworthy in those very matters wherein we judge others!

Fourth Point.—Its effects are

a. Temporal. Peace of heart is lost; friendships are broken; frankness changes into reserve, esteem into aversion; suspicion haunts us, perhaps terrifies us!

b. Spiritual. The evils that follow this vice are *sin*, sometimes mortal; great loss of that charity which "covereth a multitude of sins;" evil speech, opprobrium, detraction, calumny, etc.

c. Eternal. "Judge not that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you have judged, you shall be judged" (Matt. vii, 1-2)—a consoling thought for the charitable heart, and a truth insisted upon by Our Lord in the *Beatitude:* "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Conclusion.—Indicate the means to be employed for the avoidance of this sin. They are suggested by the preceding points. Justice, charity, humility; the examples of Christ and the Saints; the consciousness of our own multiform and manifold sinfulness: "He that is without sin among you first cast a stone at her" (John viii, 7), said Christ to the accusers of the adulteress!

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.

Epist. Heb. I, 1-12.
Gosp. John I, 1-14.

Subject.—*Receiving the Saviour.*

Text.—"*He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the Sons of God.*" (Gospel.)

Introduction.—We thank God this day for the Redeemer He hath sent us—even His only begotten Son! How shall we receive and entertain this Guest? Time was when His *own*, His own peculiarly beloved people, received Him not! Is it possible for us to be guilty of such ingratitude?

Transition.—How often He has already come to most of us! *How have we* received and entertained Him? In what

temples of the heart have we worshipped Him—adorned with the gold of solid virtue, fragrant with the incense of prayer? or crumbling through neglect? or worse still, defiled with sin? We wonder at the neglect of the Jews of old—why do we not wonder at the neglect of Christians of the present day? nay, of ourselves? Let us make this day a resolution to receive Him by

First Point.—*Receiving His doctrine*, and fulfilling its obligations. To this end, meditate on His *words* and His *actions*, His *life* and His *death*.

Second Point.—*Receiving Himself* in Holy Communion. (Develop: The *same* Christ, the *same* Fount of Grace, the *same* Teacher of spiritual truths, the *same* Saviour applying thus to our souls the fruits of His death.)

Third Point.—(Illustrate by chapter xxv of St. Matt., vv. 34 to 46.) The saints saw, not alone in the poor, but in everybody, the representatives of Jesus Christ; hence their charity, their alms, spiritual and temporal.

Conclusion.—We have received Christ in Baptism, becoming thus, through His merits, "sons of God." Having received this "adoption of sons of God, whereby we cry *Abba, Father*," let us, by *putting on the Lord Jesus Christ*, as the Apostle admonishes us, strive to become less unworthy of being "heirs indeed of God, and co-heirs with Christ." Amen.

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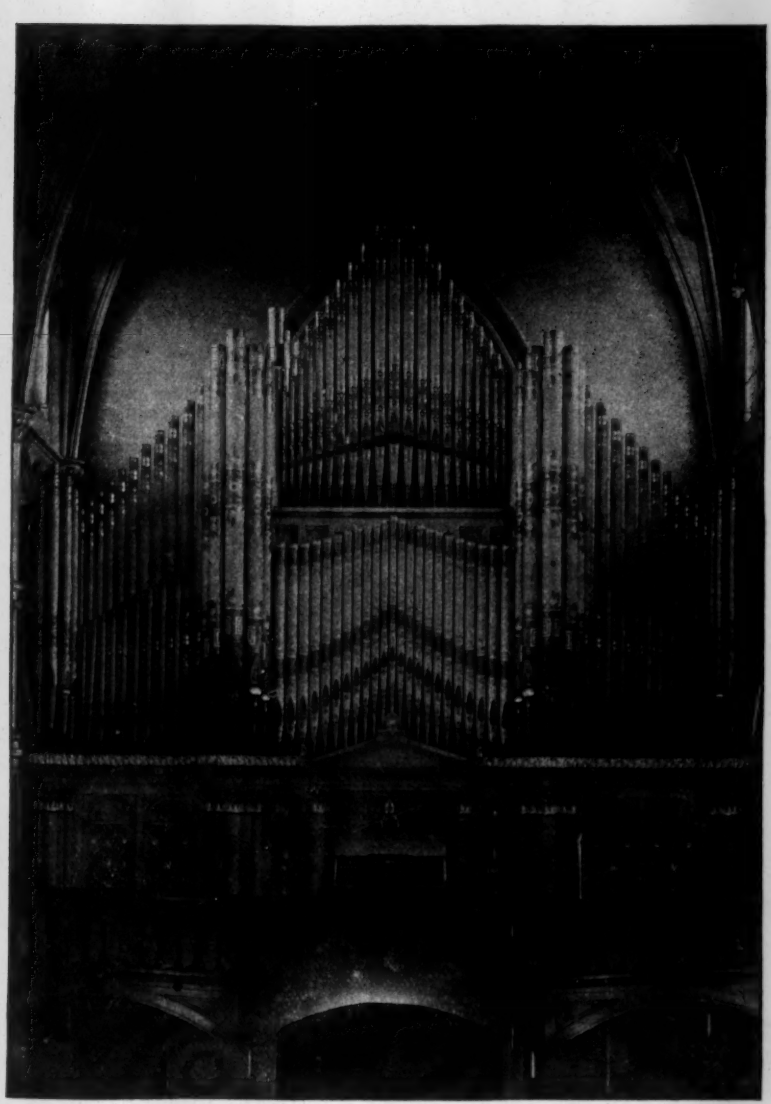

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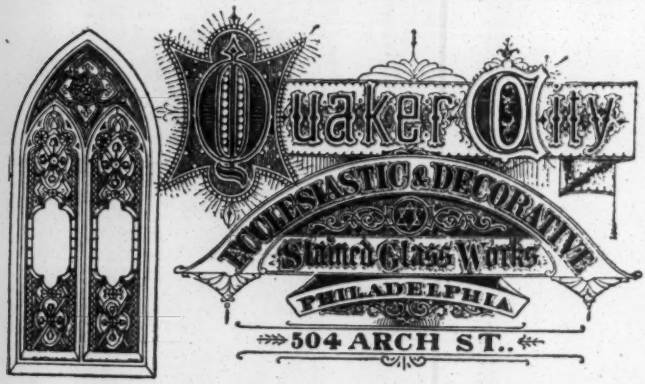

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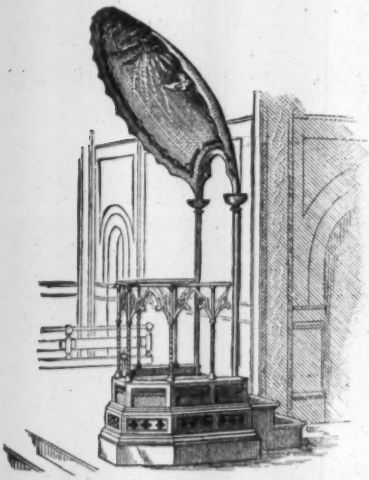

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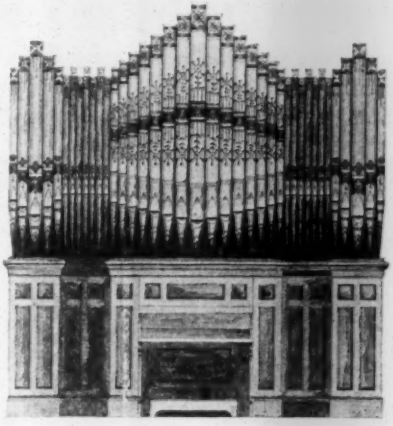

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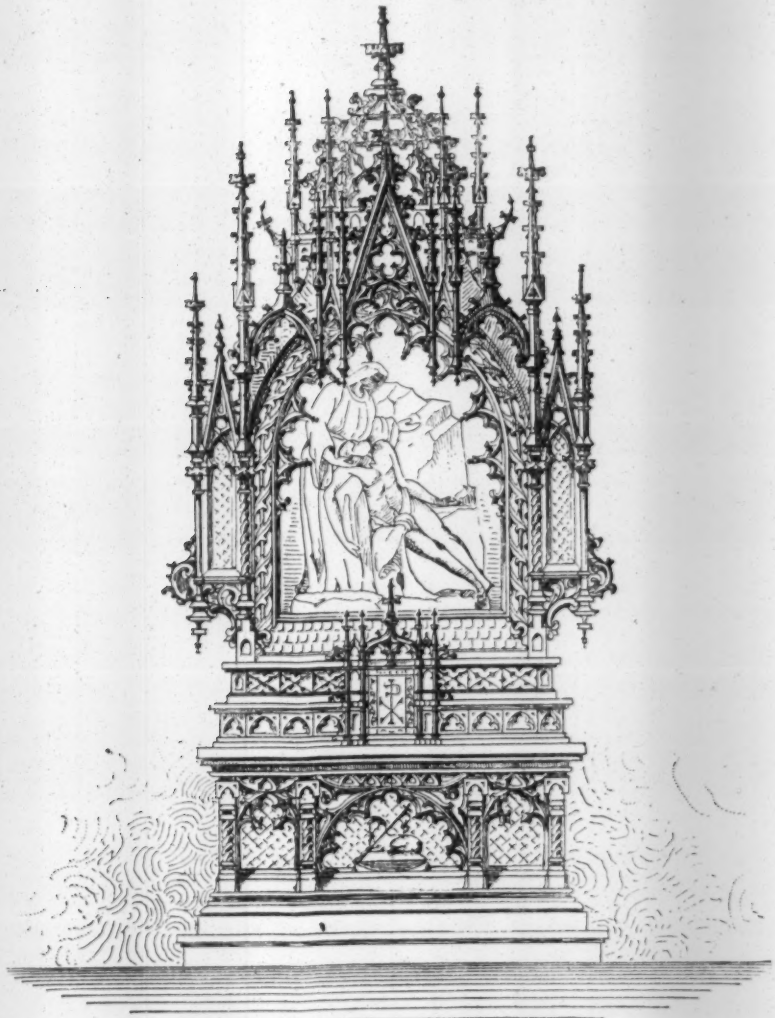

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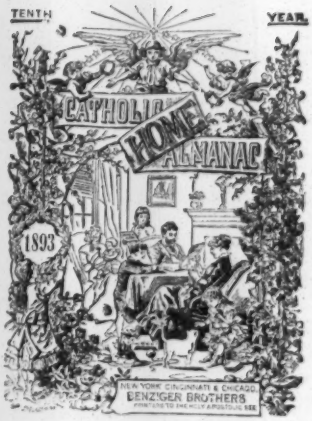

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CONTENTS.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION IN THE EARLY CHURCH, 401
The Rev. H. J. Heuser, Overbrook Seminary.

II. THE PRIEST ON SICK CALLS, 409
P. Arminio.

III. MORAL THEOLOGY—Its Methods (Art. XVII of Clerical Studies), 418
The Very Rev. J. Hogan, DD., Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.

IV. ANIMADVERSIONES IN SOLUTIONEM CASUS DATAM Ab Aug. Lehmkuhl, S.J., et Jos. Aertnys, C. SS.R. 429
The Rev. Aloysius Sabetti, S.J., Woodstock College, Md.

V. FATHER CHARLES. A Saint of Our Own Times. 434
L. W. Reilly, Hanoverville, Md.

VI. CONFERENCES:

Our "Casus Conscientiae." Present Stage of the Discussion.—Comments and Suggestions 448
Restitution in a Case of Legal Bankruptcy 452
Altar Boys Dressed as Miniature Prelates 455
The "Impedimentum Criminis" 456
Supplying the Ceremonies of Solemn Baptism 456
Affinitas Spiritualis et Jus Debitum reddendi. 457
When Did the Baptist recognize Christ? 458
Is it a Case of Restitution? 459
A Timely Suggestion Anticipated 461

VII. ANALECTA:

Approbatio Instituti Soror. ab Immacul. Conceptione. (Decret.) . 462
Commutatio Voluntatis 462
Dispensatio ab Irregularitate 465
Dispensatio Matrimonii Rati 466
Dubium quoad Ordinationes 466

VIII. BOOK REVIEW:

CATHREIN: Philosophia Moralis 472
BIBLIOGRAPHIA BENEDICTINA 474
CORNOLDI-DERING: Physical System of St. Thomas . . . 475
BOURNE: Diocesan Seminaries 477

IX. BOOKS RECEIVED. 479

HOMILETIC MONTHLY.

177–192